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ABSTRACT

Providing students with the opportunity to establish their own learning goals is an essential factor in stimulating them to assume learning responsibility. Since the experience may be new for students, careful teacher planning for the first day is necessary and includes such preparations as creating a guideline of objectives, arranging the classroom in groups, obtaining necessary materials (dittoes, newsprint, markers), and composing a worksheet of specific directions to be followed by each group as it discusses its goals for the year. On the second day, full class discussion of the goals set up by the individual groups provides the opportunity for deciding upon a final list of class goals for the year. (Sample worksheets for the first and second days are included.) (JM)

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TITLE III PROJECT

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS DEVELOP ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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CLASSROOM-TESTED CURRICULUM IDEAS, Vol. 2, No. 1

Enabling Students To Set Their Own Objectives

An important, even more an essential, factor in students' taking responsibility for their learning is that they set the goals for that learning.

A person learns only what he wants to learn.

The old proverb has it that you can lead a horse to the water but you can not make him drink.

The first step, therefore, in helping students to learn how to learn is giving them a responsible stake in what goes on in the classroom. Let what goes on in the classroom be in direct response to their felt needs as evidenced by what they have said they want to learn.

Having students set their objectives requires careful planning on the part of the teacher. The experience will be a new one for the students. No one has probably ever dignified their desires in such a manner before so they will not be able to set objectives without a supportive structure. If you just ask what do you want to do this semester, they will probably say, Take field trips, Have discussions, Learn grammar, Take a day off,; and you will consider the whole enterprise an exercise in futility. If you take the time with your planning, on the other hand, you will find that the students have serious expectations of the English classroom and realistic ambitions for themselves for the time they spend there.

Irish Casey of Ballou High School has detailed the strategy she used to enable students to set their own objectives. It may help you to do the same.

It is never too late to start.

October, 1973

CS 201 325

Students set goals for the year

DAY ONE

Objectives: Students will complete a task as a member of a small group.

Students will set goals for the year.

Method: Before students enter, arrange chairs in groups of four. This seems to me the optimum size for a group task assignment.

Be outside the door when the passing bell rings. Hand each student a ditto as he enters. One per group is not satisfactory.

Make any social adjustment necessary--place left-over student in a group--break down too large groups.

When situation seems settled, ask each group who has been named secretary for the group. Give the secretary newsprint and a dark color marker. Tell the secretary to list all the suggestions the group makes. Emphasize to the secretary that he must try to write or print clearly, and in large letters.

Tell the group members to sign the back of the newsprint before turning in the list of goals.

Let group work.

Remind students of the time five minutes before the bell is to ring if they are still working.

If you have time left over (I did not) you might ask the whole group what they liked about working in groups as they did that day.

Materials: dittoes (Attached)
Newsprint
markers

Evaluation: group lists

Worksheet for DAY ONE

SETTING GOALS

Read all the directions before you begin this assignment.

1. Take a seat in one of the groups of chairs.

   Today you will be working in groups to help decide what this class will be working toward during the year.

2. Select a secretary who will keep notes on your discussion.

3. Think about English class as a time for working in these areas: writing, speaking, reading and literature.

4. Discuss the following statement: "At the end of the tenth grade, the members of this English class will be able to _____."

5. As a group, decide upon as many goals for this class that will fill the blank in the above statement.

6. The secretary will write the goals in the paper given him/her.

7. All members of the group will sign the list of goals.

8. Bring your list to the teacher when you are finished.

Students set goals for the year

DAY TWO

Objectives: As one group, the class will democratically choose goals for the year.

Students will clarify statements made the previous day.

Method: Rearrange your desks so that the room is best suited to a full class discussion. (I use a horseshoe arrangement.)

Have lists from yesterday posted on the front board. Label each list in some manner so that reference to a certain item on a particular list can be clear to all listeners.

Lead the class in discussion of the items on each list. Ask if everyone understands what is meant by each item. If someone questions an item make sure a member of the group who made the suggestions explains what the group had in mind. This can be a real eye-opener for the teacher who assumes he knows what the group meant. Make sure the questioner is satisfied with the clarification he received.

Take a vote on the items on each list. Ask for a "in-favor" and an "opposed to" count for each goal. Ask why a student wants or needs certain goals as well as why certain goals were rejected. This will not take as long as you may be imagining since some suggestions were made two and three times within a class.

While this discussion is going on, have a volunteer writing a master list of the accepted goals.

When the discussion ends, post the master list and ask class if anyone has comments. Revise if necessary.

You can leave the goals up for the class to glance at now and then, or you can make a dittoed list of the goals for each class so that everyone can have a copy for his folder.

Materials: newsprint from yesterday
newsprint for master list
marker pen

Evaluation: Class approved list of goals for the year.